1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

Geidam in the north, where another anthropologist, Abraham Rosman, and his wife were working. Discussions with Dr. and Mrs. Rosman helped all of us to see many of the unique features of Kanuri life that stemmed from our particular towns as against more general Kanuri patterns of behavior that were widespread throughout the society. We also became acutely aware of the kinds of variations that could occur across communities as they varied in size, ethnic composition, and quality of the political leadership. At the end of the first field trip, my wife and I spent three months in the capital city of Maiduguri looking at government reports and district notebooks, and acquainting ourselves with many of the special activities that characterize courtly life at the center of the emirate.

In 1964 and again in 1965 I returned to Bornu. On my previous visit the country had been a colonial holding of Great Britain, now it was part of the independent nation of Nigeria. My task in this second visit was to gather statistics on marriage and on divorce rates. But it also gave me a chance to see old friends, and catch up on what had been happening locally since my last visit seven years earlier. Some changes were readily apparent. A large number of deep wells were sunk all over the province, and these now provide enough water for a greatly expanded livestock population. Everywhere the cattle are healthier, fatter, and above all much more in evidence. They block roads and are seen herded in large numbers to and fro wherever one wanders over the countryside. Furthermore the people are less afflicted by parasites because the deep water is uncontaminated, as much of it was not during my first visit. There is now a large modern abattoir and a ground-nut oil refinery in the capital city, and in late 1964 the Nigerian railway finally pushed through to Maiduguri to connect the Bornu capital with Nigeria's national railway system. On the other hand, detailed questions about various traditional practices indicated that there have been few changes at the cultural and social level. At the political level where there were English District Officers and other officials of the regional government, now these posts are filled by Nigerians, generally from other parts of northern Nigeria. However it is for the most part correct to use the present tense in describing Bornu, and when this is not true I will attempt to mention the special circumstances that have brought on the changes.

Magumeri, our home for seventeen months in 1956 and 1957, sits on top of one of the ridges of Bornu, and there is a steep climb onto it from the motor road that travels along the bottom of the ridge for most of the year. During the rains, the road runs along the sandy top of the ridge, to keep clear of the large muddy areas formed at the ridge bottom. Magumeri includes approximately 2000 people about half of whom live in surrounding hamlets within the boundaries of the village area. It is a district capital and thus has a two-room primary school, a court house, and the large compound of the district head who administers twenty-one village areas, containing 50,000 people, living in an area of approximately 850 square miles. The village has a weekly market on Sunday, and is divided up into a number of wards under the village area head who is also the political leader of its surrounding hamlets and officially the political subordinate of the district head. Except for the fact that it has a somewhat lower proportion of non-Kanuri compared to most others, Magumeri is a "typical" Bornu village in terms of its size, occupational ranges of the population, and influences it receives from the capital and the world beyond the emirate. Indeed this is why I chose to spend most of my time

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184 of another anthropologist, Mr. A. Rosman, who spent a large part of his field work time in the town of Geidam. Periodic conversations with Mr. Rosman, plus the exchange of visists and information contributed enormously to our understanding of the generality of some Kanuri traits as against the local peculiarities of others.

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• (127) During the final three months of field work, the writer and his wife moved into the capital and devoted part of the time to an analysis of all available government records covering the colonial period in the area. Ethnographic work at the court of the Shehu and in Maiduguri as a whole was carried on at the same time. However, it is painfully evident that much more work in the capital, using the methods of urban sociology as well as anthropology, is needed to complete a study which the present work has only begun.

128 The work is in three parts. The first part introduces the people and the locality giving pertinent information of population, geography and ecology. Also included in this section is an historical sketch of the pre-British period as well as an account of the significant changes introduced by the colonial era.

The second part deals with interpersonal relations. Here kinship behaviour norms are related to social interaction in the community at large, and these are described as they operate in the local residence groups. Marriage relations illustrate how the norms of behaviour operate between groups and individuals in the husband-wife relationship. The life cycle material then documents the manner in which individuals are recruited into and live within the small and large scale social structures of the society.

The third part deals with the wider scaled forms of social life. Stratification by various status dimensions is discussed and it

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642 The political organisation of the 19th century was almost completely overhauled by Rabeh. Fiefs were re-constructed with new boundaries and given to his own followers, while the old fief holders were often killed. But it should be stressed that complete chaos was not the rule of the day, as many writers have assumed. Rabeh was establishing a state under a new and alien leadership. It had been done by Lamino at the beginning of the 19th century, albeit with much less internal turbulence. It is most probable that had history given him the chance Rabeh would have founded the third dynasty of the Bornu empire and linked its relations much more closely to the east. It was European events that impaired the direction of this development. Rabeh's triumph and abortive attempt at empire building was cut short because in the European world the "scramble for Africa" had come to Nigeria and was rapidly closing in on the would-be king.

• 127 The presence of a good sized literature on pre-British Bornu, including travellers's accounts, the extant collections of early Kanuri records, especially the historical writing of Ahmed ibn Fartua,(1) and the so-called "District Notebooks" of early 20th century British Colonial Officers who tried to reconstruct the pre-Rabeh political organisation and tax structure of Bornu, enable us to say something about the life of the Emirate in its pre-European period. To this list of sources can be added the oral traditions of contemporary Kanuri, especially some of the older men in and around the Shehu's court.

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642 Very little remains at present (besides the archeological material) to record the life of Bornu in the early pre-Muslim days of the

(1) Ahmed ibn Fartua; op. cit.

3: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1960 M514 Kanuri M514

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648 schools, a few more roads were built or improved and once in a while extended, local European trading Companies reported "steady progress" in business volume, living conditions in the province for European staff "steadily improved", medical facilities "steadily expanded" and so on. Certainly there always seemed to be a rather high turn over in chiefs, but this came to be part of the expected regularity of life in Bornu.

What in effect had occurred was an adjustment. The British administration had set up the organization of its indirect rule and the task of each new Resident Officer in Bornu was to implement Lord Lugard's policies to the best of his abilities. The general methods of resistance to the English administration were well known by both the Kanuri and the English and no jarring outside influence entered the scene to upset the gentlemanly tug-of-war which characterized the colonial contacts as a kind of game in which everyone knew the rules and the conditions of play, while the over-all techniques of the players did not change much through time.

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634 Now the "game" was played at the political level can be seen in the following example of the deposition of a chief, taken
[127] from the provincial records at Maiduguri, concerning the District Head of Mobber between 1929 and 1931.(1) Mobber District is in the extreme northeast of Bornu Emirate on the border between Nigeria and French West Africa. Its relative isolation from British surveillance contributed to the maintenance of officially prohibited practices well into the late 1920's.

During 1929, a touring officer (British) reported that

(1) c.f. Mobber District File; Provincial Office, Maiduguri.